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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to collect information about the graduate degree program in reading at Montclair State College, the graduates' professional and educational involvement, and graduates' perception and assessment of the level of attainment of the program objectives. Questionnaires were sent to 42 master's graduates from the graduate degree program in reading who graduated from 1968 through 1973. The college's catalog of courses was used to specify objectives of the graduate degree program in reading. Each catalog course description was studied to extrapolate objectives. A total of 28 course objectives reflecting this extrapolation procedure were constructed. A five-point rating scale was assigned to each item. Some of the results indicated that the differences between reading specialists' and classroom teachers' assessments of objectives reflecting required and elective courses and applied and theoretical information were not significant. Both groups rated objectives reflecting applied information highest and objectives reflecting theoretical information lowest, and classroom teachers rated the objectives from three of four areas higher than reading specialists did. (WR)

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AN EVALUATION OF GRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, follow-up studies of recipients of graduate degrees have concerned themselves with (a) seeking information pertaining to the nature and extent of the graduates' professional and education growth (DeSanctis, 1971; Sater, 1959; Stone, 1973) and (b) providing a basis for assessing the extent to which program objectives were achieved (Bettis, 1973; Milner, 1973, Skinner, 1972). An underlying purpose of these studies was to provide an empirical basis for futher program modifications in the hope that such programs would attain their maximum effectiveness. In addition, the information obtained could also serve to support program objectives already operational. This present study was concerned with a follow-up of the Master's graduates from the Reading Program at Montclair State College, Upper Montclair, New Jersey.

The Graduate Degree Program in Reading at Montclair State College was established in September, 1966. The Reading Program is one aspect of a total teacher education component at the College. One of its primary functions is to train classroom teachers who express an interest in becoming Reading teachers and/or reading specialists in the public schools. A total of thirty-three semester hours is required for the Master of Arts Degree. These credits are distributed in the following areas: (1) Depart-

mental Specialization, twelve to twenty-one semester hours; (2) Basic Professional Education, six to nine semester hours; (3) Free Electives, six to twelve semester hours.

Purpose

It was the purpose of this study to collect information about the Graduate Degree Program in Reading at Montclair State College, the graduates' professional and educational involvement, and the graduates' perception and assessment of the level of attainment of the program objectives. For the purpose of this paper, only those findings pertaining to the graduates' perception and assessment of the level of attainment of the program objectives have been reported.[1]

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SAMPLE

From 1968 through 1973, there were fifty-four Master's graduates from the Graduate Degree Program in Reading at Montclair State College. Of that number, fifty-three are presently living. Known addresses were obtained for forty-two of the graduates. Questionnaires were sent to these graduates, and responses were received from twenty-eight, or 66.6%. Of this total, twenty-five, or 59.5% were deemed usable for this study.

For anlaysis of data, the population was stratified

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1. For the complete findings of this report, see Shelley P. Grobe, "A Follow-up Study of the Master's Graduates from the Reading Program at Montclair State College," Master's project, Montclair State College, 1974 (unpublished).

into two major groups. Group I consisted of those graduates who were employed as reading specialists and represented sixteen, or 64% of the study sample. Group II consisted of those graduates who were employed as regular classroom teachers who did not teach reading and represented nine, or 36% of the study sample.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

A mail questionnaire method was used to obtain information pertaining to the graduates' background and their perceptions of the level of attainment of program objectives. The College's catalog of Announcement of Courses was utilized to specify objectives of the Graduate Degree Program in Reading. Each catalog course description was studied to extrapolate objectives. A total of twenty-eight course objectives reflecting this extrapolation procedure were constructed. A five-point rating scale similar to the Likert scale (Tuckman, 1972) was assigned to each item. For example, an "Almost Always" response was assigned a point value of 5, while a "Rarely" response was assigned a 1 point value. The questionnaire was then submitted to a Graduate Seminar in Reading for evaluations and suggestions. After two specific evaluation sessions, the questionnaire was deemed ready for use.

Means were computed from the five-point scale and were used to report comparative assessment (by Groups I and II) of objectives related to required and elective

courses and objectives reflecting applied and theoretical information.[2] In additon, percentages were used to report comparative assessment of objectives related to specific courses.

In order to ascertain possible significant relationships between the mean assessments by Group I and II, a corrected chi square formula was utilized.[3]

RESULTS

Comparative Assessment of Course Objectives

The data in TABLES I and II show the comparative results obtained from mean analyses of Group I and Group II's perception of the level of attainment of four categories of program objectives. Means were obtained by assigning point values to each category of response for each item (Almost Always, Generally, Frequently, Sometimes, and Rarely). Point values range from 5.0 (highest) to 1.0 (lowest).

The data in TABLE I show the comparative assessment of objectives related to required and elective courses.

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2. Applied information pertained to those aspects of the the program objectives that were or could have been implemented within the scope and time of the program and/or within the classroom setting. Theoretical information pertained to those aspects of the program objectives that emphasized understanding, concpets, and knowledge.

3. For pupose of analysis the Yate's Correction for Continuity was used. This correction should be used when any of the expected frequencis is less than 5. See George H. Ferguson, Statistical Analysis in Psychology and Education, McGraw-Hill, 1966.

The mean rating of objectives from required courses by Group I was 3.7 with a range from 5.0 to 1.0. The mean rating by Group II of these same objectives was 4.1 with a range from 5.0 to 1.0.

Group I's mean rating of objectives from elective courses was 3.5 with a reported range of 5.0 to 1.0. Group II's mean rating of these objectives was 4.0 with a range from 5.0 to 2.0.

TABLE I

MEAN ANALYSES OF ASSESSEMENT OF OBJECTIVES FROM REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE COURSES BY GROUP I AND GROUP II

Group	Objectives Related to Required Courses	Objectives Related to Elective Courses
Group I N=16	3.7	3.5
Group II N=9	4.1	4.0
Difference	.4*	.5*

*Not significant at the .05 level

The data in TABLE II show the comparative assessment of objectives reflecting applied and theoretical information. Group I's mean assessment of objectives reflecting applied information was 4.0 with a range from 5.0 to 1.0. Group II's mean assessment of these objectives was 4.3 with a reported range of 5.0 to 1.0.

Group I's mean assessment of objectives reflecting

theoretical information was 3.45 with a range from 5.0 to 1.0. Group II's mean assessment of these objectives was 3.9 with a range from 5.0 to 2.0.

TABLE II

MEAN ANALYSES OF ASSESSMENT OF OBJECTIVES REFLECTING APPLIED AND THEORETICAL INFORMATION BY GROUP I AND GROUP II

Group	Objectives Reflecting Applied Information	Objectives Reflecting Theorectical Information
Group I N=16	4.0	3.45
Group II N=5	4.3	3.9
Difference	.3*	.45*

*Not significant at the .05 level

Comparative Assessment of Objectives Related to Specific Courses

The data in TABLES III through VI show, by percentage of response to each category (Almost Always, Generally, Frequently, Sometimes, and Rarely) per item, the comparative assessment of objectives from specific courses. Determination of high and low ratings was made by using the highest two response categories (Almost Always and Generally) and the lowest two response categories (Sometimes and Rarely).

The data in TABLE III represent the categorical assessment of objectives related to The Nature of Reading (a required introductory course in the program). The data

reflect Group II's "high" assessment of the objectives related to this course as being higher than Group I's with respective percentages of 83.3 and 65.6. The percentage of "low" ratings by Group II was 5.6 as compared to Group I's which was 18.7.

TABLE III

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS RELATED TO OBJECTIVES FROM THE NATURE OF READING*

Group I N=16	Category	Group II N=9
25.0	Almost Always	44.4
40.6	Generally	38.9
15.6	Sometimes	5.6
3.1	Rarely	-

*The difference between the reported percentage and 100% total reflects the procedure used to compute "high" and "low" assessments.

The data in TABLE IV represent the categorical assessment of the objectives related to Case Studies of Reading Difficulties. Group II's "high" assessment of these objectives was 93.3% as compared to Group I's which was 83.7%. The percentage of "low" ratings by Group II was 2.2% compared to Group I's 2.5%.

The data in TABLE V represent the categorical assessment of objectives related to Corrective and Remedial Reading. Group II's "high" assessment of these objectives was higher than that by Group I with respective percentages of 81.5 and 75.0. The percentage of "low" assessment

by Group II was 0. as compared to Group I's 16.7.

TABLE IV

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS RELATED TO OBJECTIVES FROM CASE STUDIES OF READING DIFFICULTIES*

Group I N=16	Category	Group II N=9
47.5	Almost Always	60.0
36.2	Generally	33.3
1.25	Sometimes	2.2
1.25	Rarely	-

*See footnote for TABLE III

TABLE V

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS RELATED TO OBJECTIVES FROM CORRECTIVE AND REMEDIAL READING*

Group I N=16	Category	Group II N=9
18.75	Almost Always	55.6
56.25	Generally	25.9
12.5	Sometimes	-
4.2	Rarely	-

*See footnote for TABLE III

The data in TABLE VI represent the categorical assessment of objectives related to Methods of Research and Research Seminar in Reading. Group I's "high" assessment of these objectives, 47.9% was higher than Group II's of 40.6%. The percentage of "low" assessment by Group I, however,

40.6, was greater than Group II's "low" assesement which was 25.0.

TABLE VI

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS RELATED TO OBJECTIVES FROM METHODS OF RESEARCH AND RESEARCH SEMINAR IN READING*

Group I N=16	Category	Group II N=9
23.95	Almost Always	22.2
24.0	Generally	18.4
30.2	Sometimes	13.9
40.6	Rarely	11.1

*See footnote for TABLE III

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Summary

There was no significant difference between Group I (reading specialists) and Group II's (classroom teachers) mean assessment of objectives related to required and elective courses and objectives reflecting applied and theoretical information. Despite the lack of statistical significance, Group II's assessment of the above prescribed group of objectives was higher than Group I's.

Group II rated a higher "high" assessment for objectives related to three out of four specific courses: Nature of Reading; Case Studies of Reading Difficulties; and Corrective and Remedial Reading. Group I had a greater "high" assessment for objectives related to Methods of Research

and Research Seminar in Reading.

The Department's two clinical experience-related courses, Case Studies of Reading Difficulties and Corrective and Remedial Reading, received particularly favorable assessment from both Groups.

Discussion

The difference between Group I (reading specialists) and Group II's (classroom teachers) assessment of objectives reflecting required and elective courses and applied and theoretical information was found to be not significant at the .05 level. Group membership and perception of course objectives were found to be independent variables. In other words, both reading specialists and classroom teachers with degrees in Reading rated the program similarly.

Despite the lack of statistical significance, however, mean differences were reported between the two Groups. Group II (classroom teachers) rated all objectives in the above categories higher than Group I's ratings. The mean range of difference was from .3 to .5. The highest mean rating by both Groups was for objectives reflecting applied information, and the lowest mean rating by both Groups was for objectives reflecting theoretical information. (See TABLES I and II).

The fact that there existed a lower rating of program objectives by reading specialists (Group I) may suggest that there exists a discrepancy between formal course work and program experiences and the daily instructional problems

faced by a teacher in a school setting. For example, a teacher in training may find the clinical situation highly structured and somewhat idealized. Often there may be only one or two students to work with. In the actual classroom setting, this may not be the case, and a greater degree of adaptation and flexibility may be necessary.

Both Groups rated objectives reflecting applied information highest and objectives reflecting theoretical information lowest. Objectives measuring applied information reflect learning experiences that could be implemented immediately in the program and/or in the classroom. Also, there exists a greater potential for transferring this applied knowledge as perceived by those graduates surveyed. The information and skills learned in this area can be recognized and measured within a given time span. The results from the graduates suggest that the Reading Program was particularly strong in this area.

Theoretical information, on the other hand, emphasizes understandings, concepts and knowledge on a less "concrete" level. In practice, it is more difficult to determine how thoroughly these learnings are achieved. In teaching Reading, there is less opportunity for the instructor to ascertain whether a particular concept was thoroughly mastered and/or applied. The combined mean rating by both Groups for these objectives was 3.67, and although considered a "high" assessment for determination of statistical significance, this group of objectives received

the lowest rating. Perhaps the reason for this was the graduates' inablility to assess their level of attainment of this body of knowledge, and perhaps the Program's teaching of theories related to Reading reflects a problem endemic to theoretical knowledge itself.

Classroom teachers (Group II) rated the objectives from three of four areas higher than reading specialists (Group I) did: Nature of Reading; Case Studies of Reading Difficulties; and Corrective and Remedial Reading. The one area which received a higher assessment by reading specialists was Methods of Research and Research Seminar in Reading.

Methods of Reasearch and Research Seminar in Reading are required courses for all Master's candidates. Group I's (reading specialists) higher "high" assessment of these objectives was probably due to this Groups' more active involvement in research related to Reading. As reading specialists, this Group is presumably more involved in journal reading and professional writing.[4]

Group I's highest "high" assessment was for Case Studies of Reading Difficulties. Although this course did not not receive Group II's (classroom teachers) highest "high" assessment, it came within 1.1% of this rating. This course is considered to be a particular strenth in the Program.

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4. It is reported in the complete study that two graduates engaged in writing which led to publication.

Interestingly, Group I's highest "low" assessment was for Methods of Research and Research Seminar in Reading. This was the one area that received a greater "high" assessment by Group I. The percentage of "low" assessment was almost equal to that for "high" assessment (.75% less). This suggests that these two courses had particular value and/or interest for almost one half of the reading specialists and little value for almost half of this same population. A reason for the intra-group disparity in agreement of assessment of these objectives may have been caused by one part of the Groups' active application of knowledge gained from these courses as compared to the other members of the Group who may not be applying this knowledge. It is significant to note that the two graduates who had articles published responded "Almost Always" to the item pertaining to the level at which they felt they were able to execute independent research.

A course that received neither highest "high" or highest "low" assessment but which received relatively favorable ratings by both Groups was Corrective and Remedial Reading. This Course, like Case Studies of Reading Difficulties, involves clinical experinces with children and was rated as a strength of the Reading Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The recommendations and conclusions set forth in this paper are an outgrowth of the major findings of this study.

Although the program objectives received relatively high assessments by the graduates, there existed inter-group and (in one instance) intra-group differences in perceptions of the level of attainment of these objectives. It should be remembered that this study was based upon a population representing only approximately 60% of those graduates for whom addresses were obtained.

The assessment of objectives related to the Program's two clinical experience courses, Case Studies of Reading Difficulties and Corrective and Remedial Reading, by both Group I (reading specialists) and Group II (classroom teachers) were particularly favorable. It is concluded that these courses provided graduate students with positive program experiences and therefore should be continued at their current operational level.

The assessment of objectives related to the two research oriented courses, Methods of Research and Research Seminar in Reading, by Groups I and II were comparatively low. If class size was a variable in assessing these specific courses, which these wrtiers believe is the case, it is recommended that class size in these courses be kept to a minimum (perhaps 15 students) in order to provide for a more intensive research pursuit. For example, current enrollment in these courses is approximately thirty students. It is further recommended that the graduate students' papers be directed toward a level acceptable for publication.

Although there was no statistical difference found between the two Group' perceptions of objectives related to various classifications of program objectives, Group II (classroom teachers) assessed most objectives at a higher level than Group I (reading specialists) did. It is recommended that there be an additional follow-up study to ascertain whether or not there persists this discrepancy between reading specialists and classroom teachers' perceptions.

Finally, it is recommended that the Reading Department supervise a periodic follow-up study of its graduates through the questionnaire method to obtain information similar in nature to that which this study sought.

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